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SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA'S ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Prime Minister is likely to request and receive a Saudi donation to implement governance goals during her upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia (KSA). According to the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka, KSA does not have a regular recurring development assistance program in Bangladesh, but responds to particular events or requests with ad hoc donations, such as the USD 150 million donated for Cyclone Sidr and flooding humanitarian relief in 2007/8. Private Saudi citizen donors are apparently required to coordinate donations to Bangladesh through the Embassy. Post will arrange a briefing with other major donors for the Saudi DCM to assist with setting priorities for use of the expected new Saudi donation. End summary.

HASINA TO VISIT KSA AND REQUEST SUPPORT

¶2. (SBU) During her upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister is likely to request and receive a Saudi aid donation to meet Bangladesh's development priorities, according to the Saudi Deputy Chief of Mission Sami Al Hindi. Emboffs met with Al Hindi February 12 to exchange information about USG and Saudi development assistance to Bangladesh. (Note: The Saudi Embassy does not currently participate in donor coordination fora in Dhaka. End note.) He noted that PM Hasina was traveling to KSA at the end of February on an "unofficial" visit, to perform the minor "umra" pilgrimage to Mecca, and had requested an audience with King Abdullah.

AD HOC ASSISTANCE

¶3. (U) Al Hindi said Saudi Arabia did not have a standing development assistance program in Bangladesh, but responded to particular events or requests with lump sum ad hoc donations. Last year, for example, the Saudi government gave \$150 million to Bangladesh -- \$100 million for Cyclone Sidr and \$50 million for flood relief. A mobile management team from the Saudi Ministry of Finance came out to manage the funds, and remained in Bangladesh for about a year, returning to Riyadh at the end of 2008, he said, adding that such Finance Ministry teams went all over the world to manage Saudi gifts.

¶4. (U) Al Hindi said 60% of the Sidr money was spent on food; 30% to purchase materials for cyclone shelters and the rest to purchase trucks and other miscellany. The KSA Finance Ministry team worked primarily with the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management to obtain guidance on what forms of

assistance the GOB required. The KSA team handled procurement of the relief supplies itself. There were no ongoing Saudi assistance projects in Bangladesh at this time, Al Hindi noted.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS; JOB RECRUITMENT

15. (U) According to Al Hindi, the Saudi Religion Attache runs an education exchange program through which about 20 Bangladeshis a year study in Saudi universities in various disciplines - including, but not limited to, Islamic studies.

16. (SBU) He noted that a Saudi Ministry of Health delegation recently visited Dhaka to recruit 2,000 Bangladeshi doctors to work in KSA. Although Bangladesh had qualified personnel, they unfortunately did not have the exposure to the types of advanced technology they would be expected to work with in KSA hospitals, he said. They found maybe 200 doctors who could do the work; that was all.

PRIVATE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SAUDI CITIZENS

17. (SBU) Al Hindi said Saudi law does not permit charitable contributions directly from citizens but requires all donations come through the Embassy. He said the Embassy received frequent small gifts for Bangladesh's poor from non-government Saudi sources (USD 500 or USD 1,000 at a time). He assessed the total of such "small" donations to be less than USD 1 million annually.

18. (U) Embaffs provided Al Hindi with a briefing on USG

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development assistance to Bangladesh, including an explanation of the international donor coordination mechanism that avoids duplication and maximizes impact. Al Hindi expressed interest in USG activities, particularly in health and education projects and cyclone shelters. Embaffs offered to arrange visits for him to any USG-funded projects of interest and to arrange a briefing for him with representatives from other major donors such as the UK, Japan and Scandinavian countries.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Al Hindi is personable and intelligent. He knows Bangladeshi issues well and expects to remain in Bangladesh at least through the summer. We will follow up with our offers of project visits and briefings from other major donors for him, in the hope that such engagement will assist in setting KSA priorities for the most efficient and constructive use of the expected new Saudi donation to Bangladesh.

PASI